Farness and Immemorial Time

An Ontology of Vestiges

Roberto Wu

Introduction

What kind of being is a vestige? What can one expect from a temporal approach to vestiges? What are the distinguished traits of this approach and which advantages and difficulties does it involve? These guiding questions help us to formulate an ontology of vestiges, to inquire into the peculiarity of its temporal existence, and to investigate what kind of meaning it may present. Instead of conceiving vestiges as mere indications of an absent being that are able to provide nothing but secondary contents to complement current narratives, I propose considering them as phenomena capable of engendering a different temporality.

In this chapter, I seek to develop the thesis that vestiges necessarily entail some dimension of immemorial time, one that eludes any sort of presentification. An understanding of these phenomena demands a reconfiguration of one's perception of temporality. It relates to, but it is not determined by, the thought of Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Levinas, and others, which has developed ways of approaching the past through discussing the existence of phenomena that refuse direct apprehension, such as traces, vestiges, and remnants, as an alternative to ontologies centered on presence. I begin by explaining that (1) events, in contrast to mere occurrences of nature, convey expressions of alterities as vestiges and that (2) the investigation of a vestige does not lead us to some presence of the past but to an understanding of beings from the perspective of an immemorial time. Contrary to Levinas, who has exclusively an ethical interest in the immemorial time, I also explore the importance of this temporality in the constitution of meanings, by connecting it with vestiges and their evocation of alterity.

I conclude by suggesting that (3) an adequate account of the dynamics of vestiges involves an openness to farness, here understood as a hermeneutic condition to open up the dimension of the immemorial.

Expressive Events

The starting point of my analysis is that meanings do not primarily concern present-at-hand beings but rather concern events.[1] As this chapter strongly relies on the correspondence between understanding of being and historicity[2]—prior to the distinction between natural and human sciences—it leaves aside the naturalized conception of events that philosophers such as R. G. Collingwood and Donald Davidson discuss in their works.[3] Contrary to their views, my study considers events in their connection with alterity in several layers of constitution of meaning, particularly in the pre-predicative level. By alterity, I mostly assume Emmanuel Levinas's conception of the other as a face, to whom I am ethically responsible and that, accordingly, cannot be equated to something previously known—that is, to the same.[4]

Phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas employ the term *event* in a historical sense, or, at least, assume a form of temporality that refuses its naturalization. Because they criticize the vulgar concept of time, namely that which conceives it as a flow of sequential moments, their conception of event brings forth notions as origin, rupture, encounter, language, and otherness, which are of interest in this chapter.[5] Nevertheless, the many affinities with their theories should not overshadow the differences between our goals, as I am not interested, for example, in discussing the event in its epochal meaning, as one reads in Arendt's works or Heidegger's later writings, but rather in developing an account of event that helps us to understand how inscriptions of alterity are conveyed in time.

On the one hand, this concept of event belongs to a level that stands prior to historiographic interest, which methodologically narrows the way something appears as a historical object. On the other hand, it may contribute to historical studies, as it leads to a consideration of neglected aspects of the ontology of history. Henceforth in this chapter I will consistently employ *event* as the inscription of the other in time, an historical account that rejects metaphysical commitments of the subject-object scheme and the ontology of the present-at-hand.

Schemes of meaning based on the distinction between subject and object, as formulated by modern epistemology, fail in properly discussing events. The linguistic and historical turns suggest that subjectivity is derived from a manifold of effects that pervades us historically and is bequeathed by means of language and institutions. By the same token, a version of pure objective meaning in terms of history is also misleading. Meanings are not limited to present-at-hand features that beings bear, but, rather, they are referred to as involving intertwining connections that are historically constituted. Because the scheme of knowledge as constituted by subject and object is a theoretical construction rather than an original state of meaning, it reveals itself to be ineffective for apprehending temporal phenomena. In what follows, I discuss some disadvantages of this theoretical schema based on the present-at-hand as an approach to history.

Conceptions based on a metaphysics of the present-at-hand have the drawback of offering a limited account of historicity, as they generally impose the present onto other dimensions of time. Conversely, when beings are interpreted in their relation to

multiple historical events, which generate a myriad of interconnected effects, one may relate to them as bearing a wider meaning of vestiges. In this broader scope, vestiges are not simply the fragments present-at-hand that result from finished events but beings that bear the potentiality of evoking events and enacting a peculiar openness to history. In turn, events presuppose a relation to human beings, whose interference, to a greater or a lesser degree, is conveyed by them. Events transmit a manifold of expressions, which does not derive directly from subjectivity reflected action but from our being-in-the-world, which is from the outset open to our belonging to a historical community. As conjoining different forms of expression, vestiges linger through time and signal both to the events in which they partook and to the alterity of those who were involved or evoked in such events.

A Preliminary Overview of Vestiges

Although surrounded by vestiges, our experience of these phenomena is far from satisfactory. This situation is mainly due to our incapacity for apprehending vestiges in their temporal peculiarity, because one often sees them as a secondary phenomenon, as mere indicative signs that have no significance of their own, allegedly because of their ontological dependence on beings that have once existed. Therefore, they are mostly considered parts of a totality that does not exist anymore, in the sense that some vestiges are taken as fragments of a previous whole being, like the head of a broken statue—but also in the sense of being part of a historical and cultural totality that did not completely survive, as a spear is a fragment of the Roman Empire. Either if we take vestiges as pieces of an entire being that existed before or consider them as an indication of the culture of other epochs, it is clear that they are consistently taken as matters present-at-hand or as signs that lead to a previous presence.

Vestiges are often mistaken, either because we normally overlook their peculiarity and regard them in terms of their presence or because we take them as a mediator to another being. In this latter case, vestiges may appear as dislocated presences remaining from the past. This way of describing vestiges may be deceptive, for it refers to past phenomena in terms of the present and, accordingly, circumscribes the former into the latter. Or, to put it another way, because such an account of vestiges extends the realm of presence into other realms of temporality, it muffles different forms of expression that may arise from distinct strata of time.

In historical research, traces are usually taken as physical evidence of what past people have left in the world.[6] To this extent, they work as indexes to a past being or context. In this regard, two points require further explanation. Firstly, as I conceive them, vestiges do not indicate a former presence but evoke receding alterities. They exceed an indexical function as they transcend every recollective attempt of reconstitution. Secondly, vestiges are not reducible to their eventual physicality, which does not mean a dismissal of the latter. It is rather a matter of ontological priority. Unfortunately, even Levinas, as providing a discussion of traces, exemplifies them through physical marks, a procedure that yields some confusion.[7] Conversely, Derrida declares from the outset that his concept of trace is not to be conflated with a form of being present.

Coined as the *différance* itself and "the absolute origin of sense in general," in Derrida's account, "the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and *no concept of metaphysics can describe it*."[8] My account of vestiges enacts a similar methodological gesture, as it does not implicate a rejection of physicality but rather claims a leeway that exceeds it. In this respect, vestiges are addressed here in the context of meaning formation and not immediately as physical evidence. A chain of vestigial evocations may relate to a physical being, but not necessarily. As an example, the activity of remembering may be awakened by physical remains that evoke a bygone alterity, but it may also be triggered off by the occurrence of a remembrance, whose prominence sets a pathway of evocations alongside other vestigial thoughts that remain in the background.

A question that may naturally arise is: how can this view of vestiges be of some interest in historical research if it does not lead to positive knowledge of the past? As I see this matter, it presents the advantage of calling attention to certain aspects that prevent dogmatism regarding our engagement with the past. It does not reject the importance of knowing and reaching accord about the past by means of diverse methodologies. It just reminds us that historical research cannot capture the past as a present-at-hand, for any knowledge of it only conducts us to an even more remote past due to inscriptions of alterity in events.

Considering difficulties that result from the hegemony of an ontology of presence in our relations with beings and history, I suggest an approach to the vestige that is based on an ontology of the immemorial past. It avoids the path that leads to a privilege of presence, insofar as it conceives different articulations of meaning in history. It acknowledges a dual production of effects in history: one that corresponds to more stable threads in history, as generated by present-at-hand categories; and another one that does not form an articulated totality, as it consists in dispersion and withdrawal. Historical research is inclined to consider every phenomenon uniquely from the first perspective, even the absent ones. By relying in processes of making matters present, such an approach fails to acknowledge and elaborate dimensions of history that stand outside a metaphysics of presence, as it exclusively produces the characteristic knowledge of a presentist ontology. Without denying the possibility of elaborating meanings with account to making matters present, this chapter focuses on how vestiges yield historical significance that recede from being captured as presences. In order to access such phenomena, we must elaborate an account of the immemorial past, as well as how this dimension of time is sheltered in vestiges.

The Temporality of Vestiges

Vestiges are not presences. In fact, when they are forced to become such a thing, they vanish. Their particular ontology brings into consideration the possibility of an absence being meaningful in its farness, as a receding phenomenon in time. In this light, the analysis will henceforth focus on the irreducibility of vestigial phenomena to presence as a basis to analyze the temporal tension between past and present.

Levinas's usage of the term *le trace* (vestige, trace), as a concept that he employs in his critique against Heidegger's fundamental ontology, is pivotal for my proposal.[9] Despite Heidegger's contempt for metaphysics, with which Levinas agrees to some extent, the German philosopher's work is mainly interpreted by the latter as a sophisticated form of thinking that merely confirms the privilege of the same. In opposition to the perpetual confirmation of one's horizon of understanding (as he reads the hermeneutical circle in Heidegger), which merely assimilates strangeness and transforms into familiar meanings, Levinas develops a conceptuality that preserves alterity from being possessed by understanding.[10] Considering that the other consists of a face (*Visage*) that does not count as a sheer being among other beings, or as an object, for it means absolute transcendence, one cannot apprehend this alterity by means of her actual properties, insofar as the other refuses being captured as a presence.[11]

In Levinas's account, the other does not consist of presence, with the distinctive trait of merely being someone else except me, but is instead a face that does not belong to the economy of presence. Alternatively, vestiges retain in themselves inscriptions of the alterities that become their bearers. Vestiges transcend the function of being a mark of something or someone that exists, as an index that points to its presence; on the contrary, vestiges evoke forms of alterity that, as such, recede from being captured in present-at-hand reconstitution. Therefore, meanings opened up by vestiges differ from those based on an ontology of the present-at-hand, which determine most of one's interpretation in the world. Connections among vestiges cannot be retraced to a notion of original presence, because vestiges express alterities involved in a chain of historical events.

Vestiges bear these inscriptions of alterity, although one ordinarily fails to notice them while approaching them in terms of something present-at-hand. The prevalence of a metaphysical interpretation of being reflects an account of temporality that merely connects events in a linear pattern. In order to avoid this conception of temporality, as it prevents an access to historicity, an understanding of receding meanings is needed. As it is proposed here, the uses of vestiges in historical research are far from being mere reconstitutions of presences, as they disrupt our horizon putting us in contact with a bygone past.

In everyday affairs the past does not appear as such, but, rather, as an extension of the present. It is readily taken as part of the major horizon of the present, without any need of mediation because it is already assimilated as a presence, even if a fragmented one. The idea of a fragment conserving a part of the past shares, in a certain sense, this premise. Underlying this attitude, there is the assumption that what counts as meaningful is only that which meets present-at-hand standards. The ubiquity of this attitude blocks a proper access to past phenomena as such, because it levels the past to the present. As temporal phenomena, past and present necessarily conflict, for they engender contrary movements: the former moves away from the present and tends to fade out while the latter tends to incorporate the past as presence. There are plenty of categories designed to capture the past into the present, although it is rare to find concepts compatible with the withdrawal of the past, which does not consist of the retreat of something present-at-hand but of an openness to a bygone alterity.[12] As one

is usually unprepared to deal with receding phenomena, the ordinary understanding of vestiges is far from reaching its full potential.

Vestiges are essentially disruptive, for they engender insurmountable intervals between the present and the past. They elicit a discord between the past and the present and, as such, provide an experience of time, instead of simply displaying the past. Rather than reconstituting a bygone world, vestiges evoke the vastness of what has been, which always surpasses any attempt to represent it as a presence. Meanings evoked by vestiges bring forth the tension of the disruption of an elusive past in the present. These meanings do not consist of a plain combination of past and present, but rather they express the mode in which these dimensions of time compete among themselves.

As vestiges do not belong to the present, it would be natural that scholars identify them as diachronic phenomena. However, I avoid discussing temporality in terms of diachrony and synchrony, as they still echo linear metaphors. Undoubtedly each scholar adapts and discusses this opposition in different ways since Ferdinand de Saussure's original program. Levinas, for example, understands synchrony, with which he identifies philosophers such as Descartes, Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger as egological and reserves the term "diachrony" to describe the temporal responsibility for the other. This diachrony expresses the temporality of the immemorial past and its potentiality of disrupting our present horizon. To be sure, this is primordially an ethical claim, in which diachrony corresponds to the responsibility for the other that is prior to any experience. Although I agree with Levinas on the main lines of his proposal, I would rather discuss history in hermeneutical terms, for they enable a broader discussion on historical meaning. While Levinas's interest in temporality is restricted to alterity, my aim is to provide a comprehensive account of meaning that explores the relevance of expressions in history and provides an adequate conceptuality that welcomes the other that is evoked by them.[13]

Regarding Levinas's rejection of hermeneutics, one may dispute his characterization of this subject as one-sided, as he expects a theory of the responsibility for the other that is lacking, according to his reading, in the works of Husserl and Heidegger. However, hermeneutics as developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Gianni Vattimo, to name a few, places the subject of alterity in the heart of their proposals.[14] My account, which is indebted to this tradition as much as it acknowledges the relevance of Levinas's and Derrida's critiques, indicates the possibility of understanding historical meaning by means of vestiges, as the interpreter does not do violence to the alterity they convey but instead perceives a significance that constitutes itself in the farness.

Challenges of Elusive Phenomena

Inasmuch as the hegemonic ontology that works as the basis for every comportment in the world relies on presence, one is inclined to interpret elusive phenomena as secondary or imperfect ones, in comparison with presence. This results in a general difficulty in recognizing the importance of vestiges themselves because they are often overshadowed by a correspondent presence. However, the hermeneutic

orientation toward vestiges differs from methodologies that examine them as something present-at-hand. The metaphysical standpoint uses a methodology based on a stable set of categories that may be applied to a cluster of phenomena. Conversely, the hermeneutic orientation depends on an entirely different attitude, which must correspond to the peculiar way in which vestiges evoke the past in a series of dispersive references.

While the impermanence of present-at-hand phenomena is linked to an alteration coming from a stable configuration or stabilizing tendency, the dispersive dynamic of vestiges belongs to a distinct sphere, namely to that of alterity. Here I draw on Levinas's conception of the other as infinite. The primary character of vestiges is not that of the announcement of presence but the double feature of evoking an infinity and realizing that this act can never be fulfilled by anything present-at-hand. Vestiges are not simple impermanent phenomena, although they resemble other transient beings in some respects, but, rather, primarily phenomena that channel alterity. Vestiges point out not only to a bygone past but also to the very impossibility of our coincidence with that past.

An interpretation of vestiges does not bring us back to a present-at-hand origin, but, rather, it sends us to a polyphony of voices or a multiplicity of expressions, to a complex, intertwined, and never-ending production of effects. Vestiges are bearers of a manifold of inscriptions produced by alterity that successively direct us to other events.

As elusive phenomena, vestiges transcend the present in their evocations. The present takes place within a broader horizon of time that it cannot encompass, although its cognitive tools create the illusion that it can extend to other epochs. Despite the fact that some past beings persist in our present, they never fit perfectly to it, as they also refer to a time that differs from ours. A vestige produces a gap that cannot be completely fulfilled, for while it persists in the present, it also bears inscriptions of a remote time that refuse presence. Every vestige is itself the bearer of multiple inscriptions, which redirect our understanding to orientations of meanings in nonlinear patterns. This vastness of inscriptions does not form a figure; rather, it is properly the refusal of any encompassing picture. Threads opened up for inscriptions lead to paths that conflict our horizon, instead of merely extending it.

If one attempts to follow the chain of vestiges, then one is always conducted to something prior, without being able to deploy entirely this chain of meanings. In other words, the experience of vestiges brings up the experience of an immemorial time. The other leaves her mark in the world of vestiges by engrafting a different temporality in them. In Levinas's account, the immemorial time refers to the infinite responsibility toward the other, which has no beginning as it is always prior to any behavior in the world. As a modification of the Levinasian proposal of immemorial time, I propose the experience of farness as the phenomenological counterpart for the ethical proximity with the other. I establish or realize a relation of proximity with the other every time her face leads me to an infinite responsible engagement with her. Nevertheless, this proximity also entails a sense of farness, inasmuch as in order to meet the call of the other I am required to consider the inevitable distance between me and a transcendence, a remoteness that is hinted at in each vestige.

Vestiges, Farness, and Immemorial Time

An ontology of vestiges requires a completely different attitude concerning being and history. On the one hand, it challenges the predominant interpretation of beings in their character of presence; on the other hand, it opens up the possibility of considering other ways of relating to temporality. Although vestiges may eventually incorporate some features of indexes, they distinguish themselves from the latter as they do not limit themselves to indicating something present in the world. The connection between an index and what it indicates is generally based on the present-at-hand ontology, which simply links a being to another. Conversely, vestiges do not aim to present-at-hand beings but to the otherness of bygone beings. They evoke them in order to maintain their otherness in comparison with anything present. This interval, which simultaneously links us with the past and preserves it as such, is that of *farness*.

An experience of vestiges as such entails necessarily an emergence of farness. Most of the conceptual tools derived from a theory of signs are insensible to such a dimension of meaning, as they involve a version of ontology based on present-at-hand assumptions. Phenomenological reconsiderations of fundamental categories of understanding, including time and space, are usual since Husserl's critique of the so-called "natural attitude." According to Husserl, this attitude takes naively our behavior toward beings as grounded in, among other assumptions, a given world constituted by means of the mathematization of the world. Conversely, Husserl shows the interdependence of world and consciousness, for any content of meaning is intentionally co-constituted.[15] A similar methodology is employed in Heidegger's critique of vulgar conceptions of space and time in *Being and Time*, which states that any concept taken in its metaphysical sense is derivative from Being-there's (Dasein's) existential structure. In particular, §22–24 analyze how the metaphysical account of space is possible only assuming the existential spatiality of Dasein that takes place in his "there" (*Da*) in his openness to being.[16] Without assuming Husserl's and Heidegger's theoretical backgrounds or purposes, I draw on their phenomenological gestures in order to propose a notion of farness distinct from that which is conceived in mathematical-spatial terms.[17]

As belonging to our existential structure, the understanding of something from the perspective of its farness differs from the mere measurement of the distance between two present-at-hand coordinates. In general, our involvement with beings considers them uniquely in their presence, both in temporal and spatial sense. Our connections with beings are presently oriented, whether performing tasks employing tools, or talking to another person that lives in a distant country by means of some device, or remembering someone seeing her or his photograph. Most of the time, activities such as these focus on present features; and when they deal with dimensions of past and future, they tend to presentify them. Present-centered operations disregard other forms of relating with spatiality and temporality, as they tend to absorb and transform past beings into present-at-hand objects. The presentification of vestiges does not only mean a consideration of them from the viewpoint of the present, while ascribing values and conception of our time, but also an interpretation of their significance in terms of

present-at-hand data, either as quantitative information, while converting them into numbers or physical properties, or qualitative indexes, as confirming or discrediting historical beliefs. In dealings with vestiges, one usually takes them as remaining forms of the past, in the sense that they *present* a piece of the past. Considering its ontological naivety and its commitment with metaphysical assumptions, I propose we abandon this interpretation of vestiges.

The in-between character of vestiges, which often allows them to be taken as present beings and disregarded in their past dimension, also contains the possibility of relating properly to their pastness. The past is experienced only through farness, as it communicates to us from a bygone time. Experiencing something as a vestige, and not as a present-at-hand, means to be exposed to an expression that has not completely ceased and which has developed other significance throughout time. Vestiges do not belong entirely to the present, but they are not vanished phenomena either. Describing them as having an in-between character may be deceptive, as one may interpret them as simple connections between two domains of time that are present-at-hand. However, the privilege of the present threatens the very possibility of a proper openness to the past. Considering that the present tends to overshadow other dimensions of time, interpretations of historical meanings must take into account the asymmetry in temporal relations. In order to avoid the submission of the past (and the future) to the present, an attitude that favors an experience of other forms of temporality without limiting them to the latter is needed.

Farness cannot be quantified as a present-at-hand distance. It does not emerge from numbers but from events in which alterity is involved. Time embodies the infinity of the other as a farness and therefore configures the way beings appear to us. This infinity manifests itself in time as a farness of a world of alterities that cannot be fully reconstituted and yet expresses itself to us. Farness is not an obstacle to understanding, as something that blocks our access to beings and events coming from the past, but rather it is the primary perspective through which the past may be experienced as such. Any fixation of the past exclusively by means of categories grounded in the present is an illusory experience of the past, whereas it shuts down the driving forces coming from unfamiliar historical contexts. The subordination of the past to an interpretation centered in the present fails to experience temporality, because *it disregards the irreducibility of the past to the present as a condition of possibility of historical meaning*. Time temporalizes the gap between past and present engendering an experience of the depth of a farness, toward which our actual understanding realizes its inability at apprehending phenomena that are not contained in its habitual horizon. The experience of this gap reflects in our expressions, as it pushes our language to its boundaries in order to render unfamiliar phenomena. Vestiges direct the interpreter interested in rendering their meaning from her immanent horizon toward paths that do not form a totality. While the past reaches us as multiple paths that do not plainly converge, its experience leads us to interpret beings and events that reveal themselves as unfamiliar. Paths evoked by inscriptions in vestiges appear from a farness, which simultaneously constrains the validity of our interpretations based on the present and demands an enlargement of our understanding toward elusive phenomena.

A brief example may be useful. In Latin America, many countries had their democratic regimes overthrown by coups d'état in the 1960–1970s and replaced by military dictatorships. In Brazil, this took place between 1964 and 1985 resulting in the murder and disappearance of roughly 421 people, a situation that was even more violent in countries such as Chile (3,065 deaths and disappearances) and Argentina (more than 30,000 cases).[18] The 1979 Amnesty Law, at the final phase of the dictatorship in Brazil, freed more than twenty-five thousand political prisoners, but numbers and documents are deceptive, as much documentation was lost and other evidence was adulterated.

A facility used in 1964 as headquarters of military police in the city of Teresina-PI and reformed after the end of the dictatorship to be a mall of handmade commodities (Central de Artesanato Mestre Dezinho) is helpful to understand the dynamic of vestiges. In one of the stores (box. 34), the owner, Antonio Carlos de Oliveira, invites people to go to the basement to see the place where many political prisoners were tortured and perhaps killed. On the walls of this basement, one notices not only stains of blood and scratches of the victims but also two screws that served to tie people for torture.[19] Physical remains such as these may have an indexical function: one might take a sample of blood and proceed to a DNA exam in order to discover someone's identity. Considering them as indexes is not the same as taking them as vestiges, for the latter do not conduct us to present-at-hand information. The torture room does not solely evoke the people who were tortured there, even if we had complete information about them, but also their family and friends who cared for them, other people who have lived a similar situation, their offenders, and so on. As a palimpsest with countless layers, each investigation finds more and more expressions of past others.

Vestiges evoke a farness of a field of significance that confronts our previous understanding. In this case, the engagement with the dimension of the past does not result in a possession of a being or a meaning present-at-hand, as any meaning that shows up connects with other significances that cannot be entirely apprehended, since they belong to a remote time that refuses complete reconstitution. Therefore, vestiges are a form of pastness that disrupts the present, in order to announce a time that never returns. Because this pastness is not convertible into something present-at-hand, actual concepts and schemes fail to grasp it. Vestiges bring forth an absence that is impossible to fulfill, for it does not belong exclusively to my horizon of understanding, as it contains several inscriptions of alterity.

The source of the significance of the past is immemorial time, which is not to be confused with a point present-at-hand in the past, prior to an event; rather, it consists in the untraceable background of actual involvements. In this sense, it seems to be only a negative limit regarding the horizon of the present, which merely indicates the existence of phenomena that are not encompassed in such a horizon. However, the immemorial does refer to some phenomena, although not in the mode of something present-at-hand. A historical relation with immemorial phenomena requires an openness to the farness they involve.

Vestiges relate to an immemorial time in a nonlinear way. Each path evoked by a vestige leads to perspectives that are not represented in our horizon, inasmuch as they are inscribed by others. Yet horizons related to others do not form a unity, because

they evoke successively endless realms of the past. The interpretation of vestiges relates to alterity, but only to the extent they are evoked. The immemorial time safeguards the other, while preserving her infinity. By experiencing the farness of this bygone time, we also experience the inapprehensible character of the other, which can only be welcomed but never dominated.

The evocation of the other does not take her to be something present-at-hand that may be used, but rather as someone who addresses us from a farness. If one accepts this premise, then one should also extend this principle of alterity to past people and reject an approach of them in terms of mere presence. Past people communicate to us on a deeper level, that is, not only by leaving a legacy through material bearers but also by addressing us as others. Following Gadamer, a proper relation with the past is always a dialogue, which cannot occur if I do not concede to the other the possibility of saying or doing something unexpected. To put it another way, a relation with the past entails the engagement with a multitude of expressions coming from other people, a "variety of voices" that can only be adequately corresponded if one does not take them as present-at-hand material but vestiges of other people that transcend my horizon of understanding.[20]

Vestiges evoke a manifold of inscriptions, that is, of events of alterity, which are sent in history. These events intertwine themselves in their sendings and in the reinscription of these sendings.[21] Every reinscription produces both a fracture on meanings and new instances of sendings. Therefore, every reinscription scatters the direction of transmission, because it hands over previous events as well as it generates new threads of meaning. This perpetual division in sendings shows that history, as heritage, is nothing uniform.

Final Remarks

These considerations about vestiges reveal that they are crucial to inquiring into historical meaning because they open up a realm of temporality that exceeds present-at-hand features. One often relates to the past as a dimension of the present, as a previous present. This dependence on the present flattens the sense of history, as one does not properly relate to the past but only to a rendered version of the past in the present. I suggest that our openness to history increases when we become aware that its meaning involves the alterity of past people and its irreducibility to present-at-hand phenomena. Because of their proper ontology, vestiges refuse direct apprehension as they redirect the interpreter to a bygone horizon. When they are taken exclusively in their present-at-hand traits, they offer themselves in a way that they are limited to the temporal boundaries of these traits, while withdrawing in their pastness. However, when one relates to them in order to explore what they open up, namely meanings that recede onto events that cannot be totally apprehend today for they belong to an immemorial time, one may experience a neglected dimension of time that the present overshadows.

Immemorial time is not a type of temporality in which we are in control of beings. Rather, it confronts our certainties showing that the horizon of the present is incapable

of rendering the diversity of phenomena that are connected to our time coming from countless events. The experience of the immemorial time is also the openness to a diverse and infinite realm of expressions, which recede in their presence, in order to announce forms of alterity that have generated them. The human being has a tendency of extending his power over other beings, locations, and time; nevertheless, the other is not a being that she may dominate. Alterity can only be encountered in a form of openness, which rejects any kind of violence. As vestiges evoke types of alterities that are sheltered in the immemorial time, they do not present phenomena suitable to dominion but open up a dialogue with voices that express forgotten worlds. Vestiges signal to these distant horizons, not in order to absorb them but to experience their farness, through expressions that, despite their potentiality of being reduced to a present-at-hand, evoke an infinite distance.

Notes

1 Despite their differences, I assume Heidegger's and Derrida's critiques on the ontology of presence as a scheme to develop temporal and ontological issues. Regarding Greek ontology, Heidegger explains in *Being and Time* that "*legein* itself—or rather *noein*," as referring to "that simple awareness of something present-at-hand in its sheer presence-at-hand [*Vorhandenheit*]," "has the Temporal structure of a pure 'making-present' [*Gegenwärtigens*] of something." Consequently, Greek metaphysics provided a model by which beings "get interpreted with regard to the Present [*Gegen-wart*]; that is, they are conceived as presence [*Anwesenheit*] (*ousia*)." Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 48. In turn, while discussing the history of metaphysics, Derrida states that "Its Matrix . . . is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence—*eidos*, *archē*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth." Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2005), 353.
2 In this chapter, historicity designates the fact that our understanding of the world, other people, and ourselves involves, each time, a temporal synthesis of meanings based on the facticity of having-been in such and such way, and on the anticipation of possibilities related to the situation we belong. It may as well be described as a temporal dialogue, a communitarian interchange with a tradition that has historically prefigured our world, to which we continuously respond, while generating other effects in history.
3 Donald Davidson employs events as an overarching concept upon which actions are to be distinguished as a particular class. See Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). R. G. Collingwood distinguishes between events and actions from a methodological vantage point—the former supporting nomological explanation, the latter responding to cultural norms—reassuring, consequently, the great divide between natural science and history. See R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of History*, ed. W. H. Dray and Jan van der Dussen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

4 The same designates the realm in which there is no acknowledgment of alterity, as the other is systematically levelled to familiar terms. Levinas explicitly charges ontology as the foundation of the ambit in which violent assimilations of the other take place, whereas he names ethics the attitude that interrupts the reign of the same. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 33–52.

5 Derrida explains his account of hauntology in history in the following terms: "Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the Singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time." Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 10. In Levinas's project of the deformalization of time, the responsibility for the other is expressed as "traumatizing blow," which breaks up synchronic time in favor of the diachrony that characterizes my encounter with the other. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 53. Hannah Arendt reads the invention of the telescope, the Reformation, and the discovery of America as events that have shaped modern age, although not in a naturalist causal sense. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 248. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger states, "Dasein does not exist as the sum of the momentary actualities of Experiences which come along successively and disappear" (426). Rather, Dasein is constituted as a stretching-along, a specific movement (*Bewegtheit*) of existence, which differs from mere motion (*Bewegung*) of something present-at-hand, and which is properly called "historizing" or event (*Geschehen*) (427). In his later writings, Heidegger employs the term *Ereignis*, which may be rendered as "event" or "enowning" (as suggested by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly), a concept that designates the event of being that appropriates itself in history. See Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). The tripartite division of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* reflects the "event of understanding" (467) or "event of being" (138) as "event of art" (138), "event of tradition" (290), and "event of language" (466). "Understanding proves to be an event, and the task of hermeneutics, seen philosophically, consists in asking what kind of understanding, what kind of science it is, that is itself advanced by historical change" (308). See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006).

6 As I conceive vestiges in a nonmetaphysical way, they fall outside the opposition between traces and tellings that is assumed in historical research. Regarding this contraposition, see Jonas Ahlskog, "The Evidential Paradigm in Modern History," *Storia della Storiografia* 71, no. 1 (2017): 111–28.

7 See Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan T. Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Roberto Bernasconi (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4: "In putting out my hand to approach a chair, I have creased the sleeve of my jacket. I have scratched the floor, I have dropped the ash from my cigarette. In doing that which I wanted to do, I have done so many things I did not want. The act has not been pure, for I have left some traces. In wiping out these traces, I have left others."

8 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 65.

9   See Levinas's analysis of trace in Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 33–64; and Derrida's incorporation of that notion in Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62–73. As it will be clear along this chapter, despite their description of the dynamics of the trace, neither Levinas's nor Derrida's account of it fits perfectly in my hermeneutical proposal.

10 As it would constitute a great detour to our goals, I left aside the debate between Heidegger and Levinas and consequently arguments that justify their views. Some interesting material may be found in Michael Fagenblat, "Levinas and Heidegger: The Elemental Confrontation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, ed. Michael L. Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 103–33; and Jean Greish, "Ethics and Ontology: Some Hypocritical Reflections," in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers: Vol. 1*, ed. Claire Katz and Lara Trout (New York: Routledge, 2005), 215–26.

11 See Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 194.

12 This is not to say that only the past person can be considered a bygone alterity. Rather, the other, whether addressing me from the past or in the present, is someone who conveys the immemorial time in which I have contracted a responsibility to her. From the phenomenological viewpoint, however, the other in the present enacts intentional embodied courses of actions, whereas I can only engage with the other that is no longer alive by means of her vestiges.

13 See Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Roy Harris (Illinois: Open Court, 1983); Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and The Other (and Other Essays)*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 97–120. See also footnote 5 about the traumatic encounter with the other in *Otherwise than Being*.

14 Gadamer's notion of fusion of horizons is the basis for his project of practical philosophy, in which the dimension of alterity is pivotal. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 277–382; and Darren R. Walhof, "Friendship, Otherness, and Gadamer's Politics of Solidarity," *Political Theory* 34, no. 5 (2006): 569–93. See Ricoeur's engagement with Levinas's philosophy in Paul Ricoeur, "A Reading of Emmanuel Levinas's 'Otherwise than Being or beyond Essence'," trans. Matthew Escobar, *Yale French Studies* 104 (2004): 82–99. About Ricoeur's discussion of alterity, see Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Regarding Vattimo's interest in otherness, see Matthew E. Harris, "Vattimo and Otherness: Hermeneutics, Charity, and Conversation," *Otherness: Essays and Studies* 4, no. 1 (2013): 1–21.

15 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2014), 90. See Dermot Moran, "Husserl's Transcendental Philosophy and the Critique of Naturalism," *Continental Philosophy Review* 41, no. 4 (2008): 401–25.

16 See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 147.

17 Many phenomenologists perform the same methodological gesture with different results, as one may read in Levinas's and Derrida's works. See, for instance, Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 65–96, where he presents conceptions such as here, place, body, and time; and Jacques Derrida, "Khôra," in *On the Name*, trans. Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89–130, which offers a discussion of the many senses of "Khôra," among them, its meaning as place.

18 See Afonso Benites, "Report says Brazil's Dictatorship was Responsible for 421 Deaths," *El País*, November 14, 2014. https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2014/11/14/inenglish/1415985145_550698.html.

19 See Patrícia Andrade, "Porão usado durante ditadura military no Piauí ainda tem manchas de sangue," *G1—Piauí*, April 2, 2014. http://g1.globo.com/pi/piaui/noticia/2014/03/porao-usado-durante-ditadura-militar-no-pi-ainda-tem-manchas-de-sangue.html.

20 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 285.

21 Although I partially share some of Derrida's ideas, our proposals disagree on many levels, as in our understanding of the role of events and their connection with expressions.

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